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LETTER DATED 12 JANUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ALBANIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Upon instructions and on behalf of my Government, I have the honour to transmit the comments of the Republic of Albania on your last report (S/1998/1221) pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998) and 1203 (1998). Your report testifies to the constant concern of the United Nations on an issue that has become crucial for peace and stability in the Balkans.

I would like to recall that the agreement of 13 October 1998 between President Milosevic and the United States Special Envoy, Richard Holbrooke, which was achieved under maximal pressure from the international community, aimed first of all at bringing to an end the cycle of violence that pushed the Albanian population of Kosova to the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe. It also intended to create the most basic conditions for the return of the refugees and displaced persons, thus establishing the basis for confidence-building measures, the normalization of life and the initiation of a genuine political process. The above-mentioned agreement quite rightfully pointed to the withdrawal of the military and the police forces, and the amnesty law to be adopted by the Belgrade authorities, as the key measures for the start of a positive process in Kosova.

As of now, such provisions are far from being implemented, and the return of the displaced persons, to the extent that it has been occurring, is attributable mostly to their desperate situation and the lack of alternative choices of survival. In our opinion, the strong presence of the Serb military and police in Kosova is the source of insecurity and of the incidents which have been of growing concern lately. We strongly believe that the Belgrade authorities are far from the spirit of the October 1998 agreement; in reality they are trying to impose a pax serba, which is demonstrated by their punitive operations and the continuation of the scorched-earth policy. Therefore, the Belgrade authorities should be criticized directly and held accountable more firmly on matters pertaining to pointing out the responsible parties for the explosive situation in Kosova.

The Republic of Albania is facing the consequences of the increasingly aggressive acts of the Yugoslav army, especially at the border with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). In the first week of

January 1999 alone there were five serious incidents provoked by the Yugoslav side, such as intrusions of Yugoslav military units into Albanian territory, trespassing of Yugoslav airplanes in Albanian airspace and the shelling of the Albanian villages inside the territory of the Republic of Albania. Since March 1998, incidents of such nature have become recurrent on the border with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). It is worth pointing out here that in none of the cases has the Yugoslav party responded to the request of the Albanian counterpart to call a meeting of the Joint Border Commission to analyse the border incidents, as stipulated in the agreement between our two countries.

In the meantime, the Yugoslav officials refuse to call the Albanian party in order to verify the alleged incidents on their side of the border. In this context, we would like to stress that these acts of provocation at the border of the Republic of Albania, along with continuous allegations on the existence of terrorists' training camps (a deliberate mischaracterization of the refugee camps by the Belgrade authorities) in the territory of the Republic of Albania, as the whole bear the danger of the intensification of the Serb violence and the potential spreading of the conflict in the country of Albania. High-level authorities of Belgrade have alluded to the latter probability.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to reconfirm the willingness and the readiness of the Government of Albania to cooperate in finding a peaceful solution to the problem of Kosova. The Republic of Albania, more than any other country, is very interested in finding such a solution, which would benefit the Albanian people of Kosova, the Serb people and all the other peoples of the region. The Government of Albania is working to this end on an international as well as a regional level and with the different political actors in Kosova. My Government is of the firm conviction that the United Nations, through your authority, and other international organizations will intensify efforts towards neutralizing the factors of war, and in so doing preventing, after Bosnia, another tragedy from happening in the Balkans.

I should be very grateful if you would have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Agim NESHO
Ambassador
Permanent Representative